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ON PAGE A-1

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Sandinistas Tap Heroine as Envoy But Some in the U.S. Oppose Her



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Nora Astorga

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MANAGUA, Nicaragua, March 21 — The Nicaraguan Government plans to nominate a Sandinista guerrilla heroine, Nora Astorga, as Ambassador to the United States, diplomats here say.

But some Reagan Administration officials said they hoped to prevent Miss Astorga's nomination from being accepted by Washington. They said her activities during the Sandinista-led revolution made her unsuitable for a diplomatic post.

Miss Astorga, 39 years old, catapulted to national fame six years ago after a top national guard officer was found murdered in her bedroom. Since the Sandinista victory in 1979, she has held several high Government posts.

An 'Asset' of the C.I.A.

The man she confesses to have helped murder, Gen. Reynaldo Pérez Vega, was the second-ranking officer in the national guard under President Anastasio Somoza Debayle. American intelligence officials said that General Pérez had been a C.I.A. "asset" in Nicaragua and that they had considered him a colleague. They said they would try to prevent the woman instrumental in his murder from being accepted for an ambassadorial post.

Speaking to reporters in Managua Tuesday, Miss Astorga, now Deputy Foreign Minister, said she expected her nomination to be accepted by Washington within four weeks. Administration officials, however, said the Central Intelligence Agency, the Defense Intelligence Agency and the National Security Council had already expressed concern about the nomination. State Department opinion on the matter was said to be divided.

Department Won't Comment

Under established diplomatic practice, the Nicaraguans would be expected to send a formal note to the United States asking for "agreement" — the French term — that Miss Astorga be the next ambassador. The Administration would have the option of giving consent or withholding it. Normally, the withholding of agreement is very rare and is usually not publicized. The State Department declined comment on the matter today.

Miss Astorga attended Roman Catholic schools in Nicaragua, and also lived briefly in Italy and the United States. She recalled in an interview that the nuns who ran her high school in Managua would often take pupils to visit hospital patients or to give hygiene classes to slum children. "Little by little I began to realize that this was not enough," she recalled.

Miss Astorga entered law school in Managua and made her first contacts with the Sandinistas there in 1969. She graduated and began practicing law, and soon became acquainted with General Pérez.

Tall and slim with close-cropped dark hair, often wearing jewelry and sunglasses, she exudes an air of sophistication that blends with fervent revolutionary convictions. Some Sandinistas have complained privately that their ambassadors in Washington have not denounced the United States Government with sufficient vigor.

The United States is providing millions of dollars in aid to rebels fighting the Sandinista regime. Miss Astorga charged Tuesday that "while efforts to achieve peace are under way, Washington is doing everything possible to bring about war."

The present Nicaraguan Ambassador to the United States, Antonio Jarquín, has been in the post about a year. Miss Astorga described the change as routine.

Western diplomats in Managua said an American refusal to accept Miss Astorga because of an act she committed during the revolutionary war would further increase hostility between Washington and Managua. Foreign Minister Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann is abroad, and a spokesman for the ministry said he had no comment on the matter.

This month, the Reagan Administration said it would nominate Harry Bergold as the new American Ambassador to Nicaragua, replacing Anthony C. E. Quainton. The selection of Mr. Bergold was quickly accepted by the Sandinistas.

An Able Advocate

People close to the Nicaraguan Government said Miss Astorga had been selected as envoy to Washington because she is a convinced militant who has ably advocated the Sandinista cause in countless interviews and speeches, both in Nicaragua and abroad.